

THE AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF ITASCA STATE PARK

by

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Eighteen species of amphibians and reptiles are known to occur within the Park. Most occur in abundance and may be found from May until September. Amphibians are more numerous in species and number than are the reptiles, this in part due to the many ponds and lakes and the cooler climate in the Itasca region. Most of the amphibians and reptiles are secretive and are seldom seen unless an effort is made to find them. Amphibians are most active during the evening and at night. Though active during the day as well as night, snakes rely on speed and groundcover for protection and are usually only found by lifting boards, logs, etc.

Two species of turtle, the Common Snapping Turtle (Chelydra serpentina) and the Western Painted Turtle (Chrysemys picta belli) are found in all lakes and ponds within the Park. Females of both species lay their eggs in late June in sandy situations near water and are often seen on roads and trails during this time.

One lizard, the Black-banded Skink (Eumeces S. septentrionalis), occurs in the Park. This skink inhabits dry situations and can occasionally be seen darting through grass in rocky clearings and open fields.

Four species of snakes, all non-poisonous, are found in the Park. The Red-bellied Snake (Storeria o. occipitomaculata) and the Common Garter Snake (Thamnophis s. sirtalis) are frequently found together under logs and debris on the border of fields and clearings. Both are active in the evening just before dusk. The Red-sided Garter Snake (Thamnophis s. parietalis) and the Smooth Green Snake (Opheodrys v. vernalis x blanchardi?) inhabit dry grassy situations. Both are rare in the Park. Recent studies show that these snakes hibernate in the large ant mounds found in old fields.

The two species of salamanders, the Blue-spotted Salamander (Ambystoma laterale) and the Tiger Salamander (Ambystoma t. tigrinum) are most often found in hardwood forest types under logs and leaves. Both spend much time underground during the warm summer months. They are occasionally seen on the roads at night during heavy rains. The rough-skinned Central Newt (Diemictylus viridescens louisianensis) frequents bogs and small ponds in the shallow water and along the shoreline under logs and leaves.

The American Toad (Bufo a. americanus) occurs in abundance in the Park and is often seen on warm summer nights on the roads and trails where it feeds on insects which are active during the night.

Seven species of frogs inhabit the Park. The Spring Peeper (Hyla c. crucifer) frequents ponds in hardwood forests. The Common Tree Frog (Hyla v. versicolor) inhabits all water situations and is often heard singing at night after rains with a vibrant, bird-like call. The Boreal Chorus Frog (Pseudacris t. triseriata x maculata?) is a very small frog heard singing in the early summer with a repeated "crreek" or "prreep" sound. The Green Frog (Rana clamitans melanota) is the least abundant frog, occurring only in isolated colonies within the Park. The Leopard Frog (Rana p. pipiens) can be found throughout the Park in almost all situations, in lakes and ponds and also along margins of fields and clearings near water. The Mink Frog (Rana septentrionalis) is more amphibious than other frogs and is most often found in abundance along sedge mats in the larger bodies of water. At night during the summer, the Mink Frogs can be heard calling from the sedge mats with deep "cut-cut-cut-cut" clicking sounds. The Wood Frog (Rana sylvatica) is abundant in tamarack, black-spruce and fir-ash communities as well as pond margins.